

Riduan Isamuddin (known as Hambali), Al Qaida's chief operational planner in Southeast Asia; Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, senior Al Qaida leader responsible for planning the

September 11, 2001, terrorist attack, who was captured in Pakistan on March 1; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Remarks on the Power Blackout in Portions of North America and an Exchange With Reporters in San Diego, California

August 14, 2003

The President. Today our country—a major portion of our country was affected by rolling blackout. Canada was affected; over 10 million people in Canada were affected as well. And I have been working with Federal officials to make sure the response to this situation was quick and thorough, and I believe it has been.

We're focused on two major things right now. One is to work with State and local authorities to manage the consequences of this rolling blackout. In my judgment, the Governors and mayors of the affected States and cities have responded very well. We've offered all the help they need to help people cope with this blackout. And they've—to this moment have said they've got the resources necessary to handle it. The emergency preparedness teams at the local level and the State level are responding very well.

I also want to thank the people in the affected cities and States for their calm response to this emergency situation. It has been remarkable to watch on television how resolved the people are about dealing with this situation, and it's—I'm grateful for that. And I know their neighbors are grateful as well for the proper and calm response.

The other thing, of course, we're working on is to get electricity up and running as quickly as possible. And Federal officials are working with State and local officials to get the electricity grid up and running. Our goal, of course, is to do this as quickly as possible. Obviously, the sooner we can

get electricity up, the more normal people's lives will become.

One thing I think I can say for certain is that this was not a terrorist act. I've heard reports about a lightning strike in Niagara Falls, New York, and we're—Federal officials, of course, are investigating the veracity of that. We'll find out here what caused the blackout. But most importantly, what we now need to do is fix the problem and to get electricity up and running as quickly as possible.

I was pleased to hear that many of the airports up East are beginning to have flights leave, and that's good. So in other words, slowly but surely, we're coping with this massive national problem. Millions of people's lives are affected. I fully understand that their lives will not be normal for the short run and hope that they continue to cope with this in a manner that they have done so far. I'm confident we can get things up and running as quickly as possible, and people's lives will go back to normal.

Yes.

Security of the Power Grid

Q. Mr. President, does this suggest that, even with all the attention paid to homeland security, that the electrical grid is still vulnerable, should it have been a terrorist attack?

The President. Well, I think, you know, one of the things we'll have to do, of course, is take an assessment of why the cascade was so significant, why it was able

to ripple so significantly throughout our system up East. And that'll be a very important part of the investigation once we deal with the immediate—and the immediate, of course, is to take care of people.

You know, for example, in New York City, Mayor Bloomberg has ordered out thousands of police officers on the street to help bring calm. Firefighters are working overtime. Emergency crews are out working well. My focus is to work with State and local authorities to help deal with the immediate problem. Of course, we'll have time to look at it and determine whether or not our grid needs to be modernized. I happen to think it does and have said so all along. But this will be—this is going to be an interesting lesson for our country, and we'll have to respond to it.

Cause of the Blackout

Q. Mr. President.

The President. Yes.

Q. Do we know why this happened?

The President. Well, as I say, I saw a preliminary report. But we'll find out why, and we'll deal with the problem.

Federal/State/Local Cooperation

Q. Mr. President, you said that the State and locals had said they have all the resources they need. Can you talk about what the Federal Government might do or might already be doing to help them out?

The President. Well, one thing, of course, we're doing is we're getting the airlines running. The FAA is—as I understand, has cleared flights out of LaGuardia and Newark, for example.

The organization of Homeland Security is aimed at quick communications with State and local authorities, and I think that that communication was quick and thorough. I talked to Secretary Ridge several times. Governors have been notified, and mayors have been notified, and we're prepared to do anything that we can upon request.

Q. But it doesn't sound like they've asked you yet to do very—

The President. Not much, because they're well prepared. I mean, the first thing that I think Americans ought to be pleased about is the fact that we're better organized today than we were 2½ years ago to deal with an emergency, and the system responded well. Secretary Ridge was telling me 30 minutes ago how quickly the local authorities responded and how good the communications were between the Federal Government, the State government, the local government.

It's a serious situation, but the people whose lives have been affected need to know there's a lot of people working to enable them to get on about their lives in a normal way. And hopefully, electricity will be restored soon. I can't tell you exactly when, but I know a lot of people are working overtime to get it done.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:24 p.m. at the Manchester Grand Hyatt. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Dinner in San Diego August 14, 2003

The President. Thanks for the warm welcome. It's really great to be back in San Diego, California. What a fabulous city. I want to thank you for your help. You all

have done a tremendous job of helping us get started in the campaign. The way I look at it is, you're laying the groundwork